



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview June 9, 2017

Galdamez, Patricia ~ Oral History Interview

Corinn Williams

Galdamez, Patricia. Interview by Corinn Williams *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. June 9 2017.

This oral history was produced in 2017 as part of the *Workers on the Waterfront Oral History Project* conducted by New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center with funding from an Archie Green Fellowship provided by the Library of Congress.

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Patricia Galdamez

Facts about this person:

Age	33
Sex	Female
Occupation	Team leader, seafood processing
Residence (Town where lives)	New Bedford
Ethnic background (if known)	El Salvador

Interviewer: Corinn Williams

Transcriber: Joselyn Feliciano

Interview location: Community Economic Development Center, New Bedford

Date of interview: June 9, 2017

Key Words: El Salvador, New Bedford, Boston shrimp, fish, scallops, flounder, freezer, promotions, supervising, uniform, temporary staffing agency

Abstract

Patricia Galdamez is from El Salvador and is the team leader of the frozen fish line at a large fish processing plant in New Bedford. She enjoys her job and working with the various fresh and frozen fish products.

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[2:14] El Salvador, Economic difficulties, rising crime rates, New Bedford offered better opportunities, adjusting to new climate, family

[5:03] Six years in same company, uniform for working in cold climate, fluctuating schedule based off productivity, line leader routine, freezes seafood, scallops, Quality control, packed for delivery

[10:13] Freezing process for scallops, variety of different positions, family, process of cleaning flounder, cold climate adjustment,

[15:00] Large company, multiple locations, codfish, fish cutters, tray packaging, freezer area, job satisfaction, schedule, fluctuation hours based off productivity, products come from Vietnam, India, Mexico and local.

[20:14] Uniform, hygiene standards, tools, annual raises, promotion, racial diversity, language barriers, equality, family goals

[30:39] End Interview

Light Transcription

(2:14) My name is Patricia Galdamez. I am thirty-three years old and I am from San Salvador, El Salvador. I love my country; the problem is that the economy is failing and there is no sense of security. There are a lot gangs to the point that we couldn't sleep safely. I used to work in a shoe store. I decided to come because my sister told me about the opportunities here. I have been here for six years, I came here straight from El Salvador. It is different here, (when I first came) it was a little town like in the movies. Here it is beautiful and close to the beach but I don't like the cold but I am getting used to it. I am here with my sister and my father. I lived with my sister when I arrived.

(5:03) I only have worked in the seafood processing (since coming to the U.S.). When I came here, no one helped me get a job, so I went applied everywhere and now I have been with the same company for six years. One of the first days I remember we had to put on so much gear and with a lot of clothes because it was cold. The company is always cold even though it is summer time.

I don't have a set time to enter usually 5, 6, or 7 AM depending on the work. I get there and put on all the clothing. I am the leader of the line. I speak with the supervisor and get the schedule. They give me the paperwork, I work with my team so when the other workers come they are able to begin working. I work in the freezer. I work freezing seafood like shrimp and fish.

The scallops come in a large cardboard board box and then the scallops are in a special bag, whoever starts the job first, opens the bag and puts the scallops on the machine. The machine freezes it and then there are two workers picking out the scallops that are deformed or too small. They are stored in the freezer and that is where they are sent to Boston and other places.

(10:13) There are different jobs, sometimes the product is already frozen so we chill them and package them if the clients want. I started working on the third shift working in a different area. I was putting fish on a tray and the other workers would freeze them and then package and from there I went to the first shift. At night, I would work in the office on the computer as well, but because of child care issues I decided to work first shift. It makes it easier for my four-year-old. I started cleaning flounder, we have to take the inside out, clean out the black areas. Now I am the leader of the line in the freezer area. Sometimes I have to check to make sure everything is fine, there are seven people in my line. The cold makes things difficult but we get used to it, getting up early can be hard too. My mother cares for my son and she lives with us and that is not so bad. When my mother wasn't here it is little difficult. Sometimes the work can be difficult because sometimes there is time pressure but not usually, or if there is new kind of fish to process, but the bosses treat us fair.

(15:00) There are two companies, one is here (New Bedford) and the other is located in Boston. I don't know how many people are there (in Boston) but assume there are over 100. There is a codfish area, where the workers clean them. Sometimes I work there cleaning and packing them. There is a larger packing area, the cutters that are only men and then there is freezer area where I work. I think the freezer area is the most interesting, but it is because I have been there the longest. There is always someone there to teach the employees, the codfish can be difficult to

work with. I don't have all the practice yet. Seriously, I cannot complain about my job. I feel like maybe the cold but not more than that. I know everyone in the company. I think they are all good people. There will always be someone who complains about the bosses, usually someone new or someone who doesn't have enough hours. The hours always go down in summer and the senior employees get more hours and sometimes problems start like that. This week I worked 28 hours but usually I work 40. I usually have a consistent forty hours. In the winter there is more work but it varies, last summer I was working 60 plus hours.

The majority of the product comes from Boston. I am not sure if they come from boats or what but some stuff like shrimp come from places like India, Mexico, and Vietnam. They come frozen and fresh. When it is fresh it is local or from Mexico. Places like India and Vietnam those products come frozen so we just unpack them and put them out to thaw.

(20:14) We have to wear waterproof boots, a long jacket and an apron made of plastic, plastic gloves and fabric gloves. We wear a hair net and we must have our hair tied up well so it doesn't fall in fish. If a fish falls on the floor they throw it away or take it to a special cleaning area. Hygiene is very important. We use knives and a sharpening stone. We don't use knives but they do in other areas. The pay is based on experience and with a raise every year. When they promoted me to the leader of the line, they gave me a 2 dollar raise not including the annual raise. I know almost everything on my line so that is why they gave me the leader position and I get along with my coworkers. There are Spanish speakers here and some Cape Verdeans but the Puerto Ricans and Americans don't like the work. It is strange that they don't like it, they come for a few days and leave. I think they don't like it because it smells and it is cold. Seafood jobs are considered the worst, people don't like to mention where they work when they work here, and the people judge them as though the job is inferior. I think the entire job has dignity, the bad people are stealing and robbing. We are all working to earn for food and to make a living.

(25:00) There are men and women from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and a lot from Mexico. We speak Spanish in the company. I understand a little bit of English, there is always an interpreter although I can write (English) a little. I know if I knew (more) English they will pay me more so now I go to school. The only difference between men and women there is that the men pick up larger items and the women don't. I plan on staying here in this company, with what they pay me I am comfortable. I work with a temporary staffing agency and not for the company. Staff at the company have vacations and salaries but the temporary staffing agency just gives us sick days. It is a big difference, we would all love to work for the company. I want my son to have (a life) better than mine, he can go to school to prepare him for a better life here. I have heard that for some workers their legs hurt from the cold, possibly switching from cold to hot during the summer.

(30:39) End of Recording